

ANTI-TERRORISM: FOCUS ON RAIL SECURITY

Early on a Sunday morning, a bomb goes off at the Providence train station, causing dozens of casualties and triggering a response by more than 100 emergency personnel. That was the scenario of a drill that took place at the station on June 4. And the prospect of such a tragedy was the focus of a forum on rail security that was organized by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the U.S. Attorney's Anti-Terrorism Advisory Council (ATAC).

Joseph S. Salter, the Federal Security Director for TSA in Rhode Island, said that rail safety is a growing concern of his agency, acknowledging that, after the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, much of the nation's and Congress' attention was on aviation security.

"In TSA today, we are increasingly focused on our other modal responsibilities and the magnitude of that challenge is great," Mr. Salter told those at the forum, which drew about 100 people to the Radisson Hotel in Warwick. Federal and state agencies were represented, as were the twelve communities through which Rhode Island's 140 miles of railroad tracks run. Each of those communities sent law enforcement, emergency response and municipal management officials.



Tracks curve out of the Providence Station

The forum featured presentations by federal rail and transportation safety officials and by the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority Transit Police Intelligence Unit. Detective Sergeant Lewis Best said his unit collaborates with other intelligence groups in the Boston area but focuses exclusively on rail security. Through a Web site and a flyer program called "See Something, Say Something," the unit also shares information with MBTA riders and encourages input from them.

John Bonner, a TSA intelligence specialist, said the decentralization of international terrorism has made rail systems a vulnerable target. "The trend is toward 'homegrown,' citizens or lawful, permanent residents who are only loosely affiliated with al-Qaeda or other international organizations but still willing to carry out the objectives of those groups," Bonner said. He pointed to the July 2005 London subway attacks as an example.

TSA Director Salter emphasized the critical importance of communications and partnerships in protecting Rhode Island's rail system. "Partnerships, planning and patrols are the basics that will help us mitigate the threat of an attack against our rail system," he added.

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